

2003." By providing a new Medicare drug benefit to veterans, your measure would begin to address a vital need and concern of our elderly citizens—the need for affordable pharmaceuticals.

The increasing use of prescription drugs for medical treatment options has revolutionized the provision of medical care. Every year pharmaceuticals represent an ever-growing percentage of health-care expenditures. Medicare has not kept up with this revolution. By providing veterans with this benefit, facilitated through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and ensuring that VA does not spend scarce and inadequate resources, we can begin the process of reflecting the manner in which health care is delivered in this Nation.

This measure, unlike others, would not force the VA alone to bear the burden of addressing this national policy failure. The VA would merely be acting to facilitate a benefit offered to veterans, a benefit that would provide substantial pharmaceutical savings to the federal government because of VA's statutorily mandated discounts. In addition, this measure would reimburse the VA for expenses relating to the implementation of this benefit as well as costs incurred in administering it.

Although veterans seeking treatment for a service-connected condition, and veterans with service-connected disabilities rated at 50 percent or more are expressly exempted from the requirement of enrolling in order to receive care by Medicare benefit, and foregoing their VA health care options are always able to seek treatment for service-connected conditions at VA facilities. Additionally we request that other veterans needing specialized services be afforded access to care.

Again, thank you for introducing the "Veterans Prescription Drug Benefits Act of 2003." We look forward to working with you closely in order to pass, and ultimately enact, this important measure.

Sincerely,

DELATORRO L. MCNEAL
Executive Director.

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA,
Silver Spring, MD, March 18, 2003.

Hon. LANE EVANS,
Ranking Democrat, Committee on Veterans Affairs, House of Representatives, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN EVANS: Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) strongly supports the "Veterans Prescription Drug Benefit Act of 2003" that you plan to soon introduce to the House of Representatives.

As you know, VVA reluctantly supported Secretary Principi's decision to temporarily suspend new enrollments of Category 8 veterans only because the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) medical facilities were in such a dire under-funded state. While the approach that you have taken in moving to relieve this pressure might not be what VVA would choose in a perfect world, in the real world of a veterans health care system that is so grossly under funded this is a similarly sensible, responsible, and effective approach to provide relief to the system.

While VVA has not favored such plans to allow VA to so provide pharmaceuticals in the past because they included no way to fully fund VA honoring prescriptions written by non-VA physicians, your proposal does allow for payment of such from both Part A and Part B of Medicare in addition as well as annual enrollment fee and co-payments that are reasonable. As long as such prescriptions are provided at a net negligible additional cost to the system, VVA does favor this proposal for Medicare eligible veterans who are not service connected disabled.

In regard to the provision that would accord priority group 1 (70 percent or greater service connected disabled) veterans the opportunity to have non-VA prescription drug orders filled by VA via mail fulfillment, VVA favors such mail fulfillment as a convenience for veterans who sometimes have to travel great distances to reach a VHA each time they renew their prescription, imposing a hardship.

As the primary purpose of the Veterans Health Administration is to be a "veterans health care system" and not just a general health care system that happens to be for veterans, VVA urges that you amend this bill at mark up to require that there is a complete physical, including blood draw tests annually performed on at least the Priority 1 veterans covered under this proposal. While VHA continues (inexplicably to VVA) to fail to ensure that a complete military history be taken on every single veteran seeking health care services from VHA, and that VHA clinicians use this key data to do a proper assessment of overall health of the veteran, including conditions or illnesses that may be due to exposures or other factors during his/her military service, there is still a need for VHA to fulfill their responsibilities for medical oversight of significantly and or profoundly disabled veterans.

If this proposed legislation reduces the utilization of VHA services primarily or only to secure pharmaceuticals by only a proportion of the 900,000 veterans reported seeking services for this reason, then it will help relieve the pressure that is crushing the VHA system without leaving any veteran without alternative services.

Again, VVA thanks you for your strong leadership on behalf of America's veterans.

Sincerely,

RICHARD F. WEIDMAN,
Director of Government Relations.

IN RECOGNITION OF CLARK MERSHON

HON. SAM GRAVES

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

Mr. GRAVES. Mr. Speaker, I proudly pause to recognize Clark Mershon, a very special educator who has exemplified the finest qualities of citizenship and leadership. He has been honored as the Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals 2003 Middle School Principal of the Year.

Clark began his teaching career in 1982 at Lebanon Junior High School, as both a teacher and coach and advanced to Principal in 1992. He currently serves as Principal of New Mark Middle School in North Kansas City, Missouri, where he has been since 1997. Clark was given this distinction because of the impact he makes on both staff and students.

The staff of New Mark Middle School commend Clark for his strong leadership shown to teachers, students and community members. His humanity, humility, and sound instructional and organizational skills illustrate the importance of his impact on his school and community.

The student body acknowledges Mr. Clark for his welcoming personality that instills pride, honor and school spirit at New Mark.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly ask you to join me in commending Clark Mershon as the MASSP's Middle School Principal of the Year. Clark exemplifies the qualities of exceptional leader

and Principal and we are proud to have him as an educator in the 6th District of Missouri.

TRUTH SEEKERS SUBSTANCE OUTREACH MINISTRY, INC.

HON. DONALD M. PAYNE

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I recognize Truth Seekers Substance Outreach Ministry, Inc. on their 10th anniversary celebration in Newark, New Jersey.

Under the direction of Reverend Lance Abercrombie, Truth Seekers Outreach Ministry began its journey in 1993. Traveling throughout the tri-state area, Reverend Abercrombie and his cousin, Wayne Reynolds, worked to spread the word of how their faith saved them from a life of substance abuse. Becoming incorporated in May of 2000, they have worked hard to refer individuals to detoxification and rehabilitation centers, shelters, as well as other organizations to help assist individuals on their road to a life free of substance abuse.

The Truth Seekers Outreach Ministry, Inc. has reached out to our community to see that those in need are not left behind. They are providing a wonderful service to the many men and women in this country who suffer from substance abuse, by showing them that there is hope and that they can conquer their illness.

Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleagues here in the U.S. House of Representatives join me in congratulating Truth Seekers Outreach Ministry, Inc. on their 10th anniversary, and wishing them the best for the future.

TRIBUTE TO SOUTHERN OREGON RADIO PERSONALITY DICK BAILEY ON HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE AIRWAVES

HON. GREG WALDEN

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

Mr. WALDEN of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to my good friend Dick Bailey and congratulate him on his retirement from the airwaves of southern Oregon. Dick's commanding, gravelly voice has been a fixture of KCMX radio in Medford for five years and he will surely be difficult to replace.

Dick Bailey was born on February 4th, 1941, in Winchester, Massachusetts, a sin for which the people of Oregon long ago forgave him when they welcomed him into their warm Western embrace. Dick graduated from Gorham High School in Gorham, Maine, and afterward enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, where he served from 1958 to 1962. He went on to receive a degree from the College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California and also attended the College of the Desert in Palm Desert, California, where he edited the college's first newspaper.

Dick's professional career has been a long and varied one that has taken him to radio and television stations in California, Washington, Alaska, Vermont and of course Oregon